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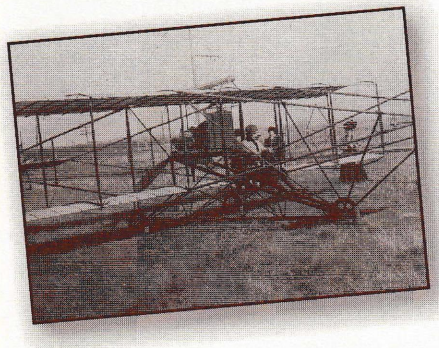


COME JOSEPHINE IN MY FLYING MACHINE!

By Judith A. Halstead

Aviation in the Lodi area has a long history. Did it take bravery to get into an early (sometimes homemade) airplane and fly away into the sky without much in the way of safety equipment...or was it just "risky business"? Perhaps it was a combination of bravery, intelligence, and a willingness to take risks.

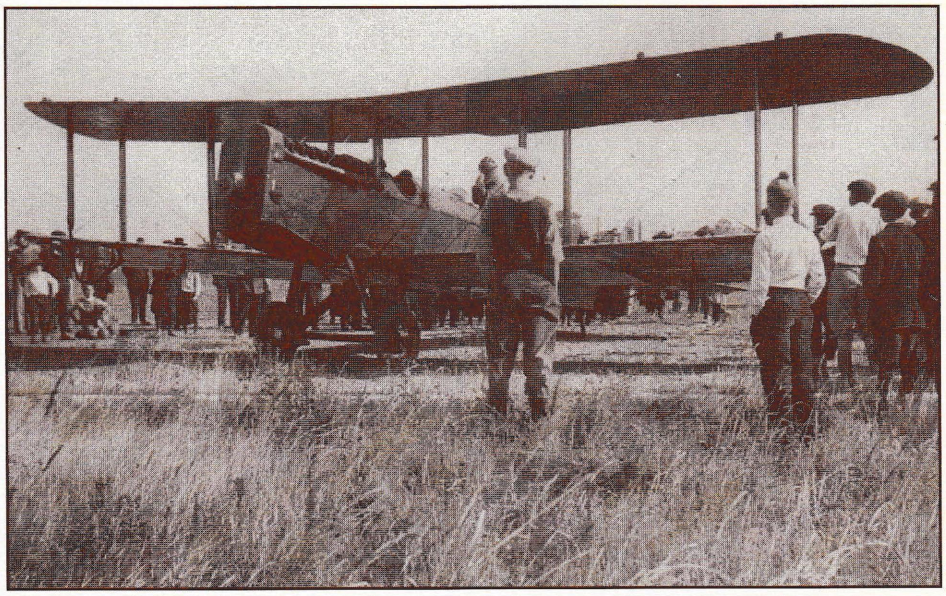
After World War I, surplus military aircraft became available on the market, and biplanes and other early aircraft were seen flying in the area. The sight and sounds of an airplane engine soaring high above the vineyards and plowed fields of rural Lodi was a thrill for any farm boy or girl. Airplanes captured the imaginations of young and old.

Lind's Airport ... Lodi Airport

One of the earliest area airports, Lodi Airport started out as a small landing field on George Jahant's property five miles north of Lodi. The property was used as a landing field as early as 1925 by pilot Mike Manassero. In late 1927, Jahant announced that he was officially establishing an airplane landing field on 70 acres of land.

The December 24, 1927, issue of the Lodi Sentinel stated that Jahant had recently plowed and leveled the ground and built two hangars, which were already rented to Manassero and George Barth. Jahant would perhaps need to gravel the runway, but it would be ready for year round use by the winter of 1928, he had stated. He offered to sell or rent the airfield to the Lodi District Chamber of Commerce, but after Lodi businessmen expressed no interest, Jahant decided to conduct the airfield as a private business enterprise.

About the time Jahant's airfield was getting established, 20-year old James N. Lind was learning to fly. He became an air mail pilot and a "barnstormer," a general term used to describe the daring aviators who



▲ *This photograph shows local machinist Russell Grigsby readying to take off from the San Joaquin County fairgrounds in his homemade biplane in 1913. Grigsby, using his machine and lathe shop located at 1215 East Oak Street in Stockton, constructed the plane just prior to the outbreak of war in Europe. Shortly after the war, the first commercial airplane flights would land in Stockton.* *Courtesy The Bank of Stockton Historical Photograph Collection*

▲ *In a Lodi News Sentinel photo on Wednesday, June 11, 1958, Albie Lind is pictured beside a Cessna 190 available for charter flights.*

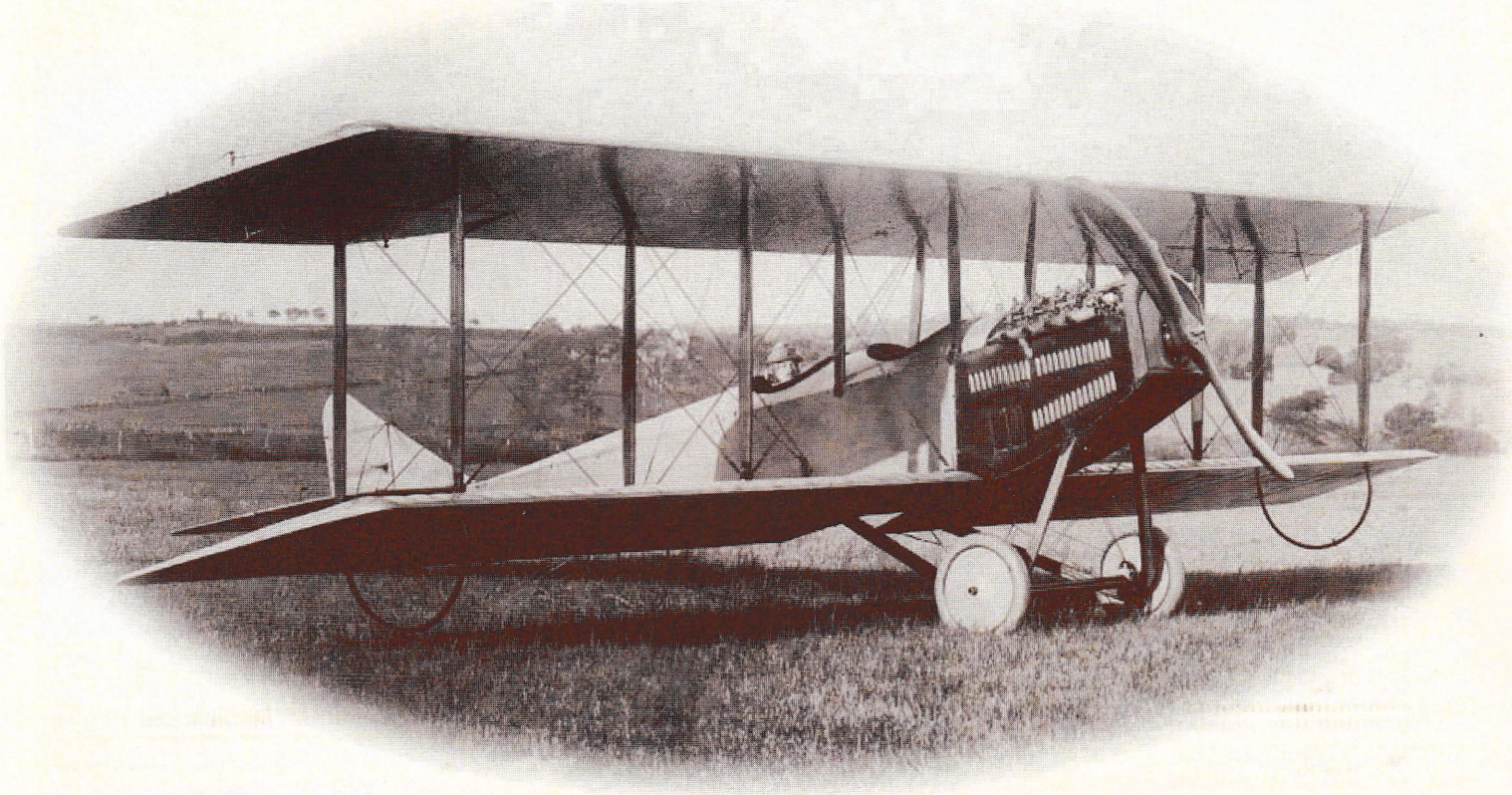
often flew over rural areas giving impromptu air shows and rides for money, charging about $5.00. Lind, wearing the traditional goggles and flying helmet in the open cockpit planes of the day, flew the first air mail out of Lodi, according to his obituary published in the Lodi News Sentinel September 1, 1970.

In 1930, Jim Lind started Lind's Flying Service at the Jahant airfield. Over the next decade he flew over the state and the nation, gave flying lessons and was contracted to fly the California governor from Sacramento to Los Angeles for important meetings. He orchestrated the thrilling aerial stunt show, parachute jumping and aerial fireworks at the Lodi Grape Festival in 1934. At that time he and his wife Mildred and their children lived at the airfield also, and on foggy winter nights when he returned from a trip she and their two boys would run out and light fires in tires to guide Jim as he landed the airplane.

At the start of World War II non-military flying was curtailed on the west coast, and Lind closed the airport in 1941. After the war James Lind's younger brother Albert "Albie" Lind became the flight instructor, owner and operator of the airfield then known as Lind's Airport. He further developed the airport by adding more land, building more hangar space and renting it out to plane owners. It was also the center for local sales and service of used airplanes.

On a personal note, Albie was also known for his kindness and generosity. Dairy cows must be milked twice a day, so dairy farmers can't leave their farms for very long. Rosa Mae Hacker's parents, Martha and Lorell Perry, had a dairy on Twin Cities Road, and when her mother died in August 1960, the funeral was to be held in Hemet, California. Albie Lind helped by flying family members to Hemet after they had milked the cows in the morning. He waited at the airport there and returned the family to the dairy so the cows could be milked again the same day.

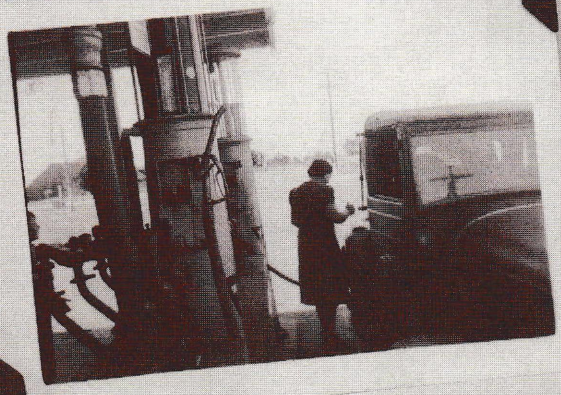
The airport is now Lodi Airport, bought by Robert E. Kupka in 1977.



▲ *James N. Lind, mid 1930's.*

SEASIDE SERVICE STATION

Pilots and the people watching the airshows need to eat. In 1938, Adeline Heinle Fachner's parents, John and Frieda Heinle, operated the Seaside Service Station at Lind's airfield, and the family lived in rooms attached. Food was cooked for customers in the family kitchen, and gas was pumped for cars and planes. Adeline remembers that on Sunday afternoons their side screened porch was jam-packed with people watching the airshows. She helped her mother "flip" hamburgers and take short orders, while her brother Elder loved to go up in the planes. There was also a bar and dance floor, so the corner of Jahant Road and Highway 99 was a pretty busy place! These pictures show the Heinle family in front of the Seaside Service Station, John and Frieda Heinle in the grocery area, and Adeline's mother pumping gas. Today, Adeline Fachner lives in Woodbridge.



Do You Want To Go For an Airplane Ride?

In 1930, young Gladys Handel's cousin, Ella Handel, was visiting from Menna, South Dakota. On a Sunday afternoon, E.F. Handel, Gladys' father, jokingly asked the girls, "Do you want to go for an airplane ride?" "Yes!" they answered. "Where do we get one?" Off to Lind's airport they went. "Be sure to wear your coats," Gladys' mother said. "It will be cold up there." The airplane ride was about twenty minutes long; there was no safety equipment, goggles, or parachutes, but they were wearing leather helmets. When Gladys was interviewed for this Historian, she said, "It was unbelievable!" Martha Handel, Gladys' mother, took this picture so the cousins could remember forever their first airplane ride. E.F. Handel is standing on the wing, Ella is in the dark coat, and Gladys is on the right wearing her mother's coat. Today, Gladys Mettler lives in Lodi.

It is the second largest privately owned airport in California. Lodi Airport is the base for emergency response helicopters for the region. It offers fuel and other general aviation services including a flight school, maintenance facilities, and a glider center. Today, 167 airplanes can be housed at Lodi Airport. Lodi Airport has one of the most active skydiving operations in the state, attracting many adventurers and onlookers to this historic site. It is also home to the popular Lodi Airport Café, previously Seaside Service Station.

Kingdon Airpark

Just before and during early World War II, the United States government became active in building airstrips. Kingdon Airpark on DeVries Road, southwest of Lodi, and Franklin Airport on Twin Cities Road, south of Sacramento, were used primarily for military flight training. Training pilots took off from the military airbase at Stockton field (now Stockton Airport) and flew toward New Jerusalem Field southeast of Tracy or north to Kingdon. They landed at Kingdon where crosswinds provided a challenge. The pilots took off again and continued on to Franklin for more practicing and taking off.

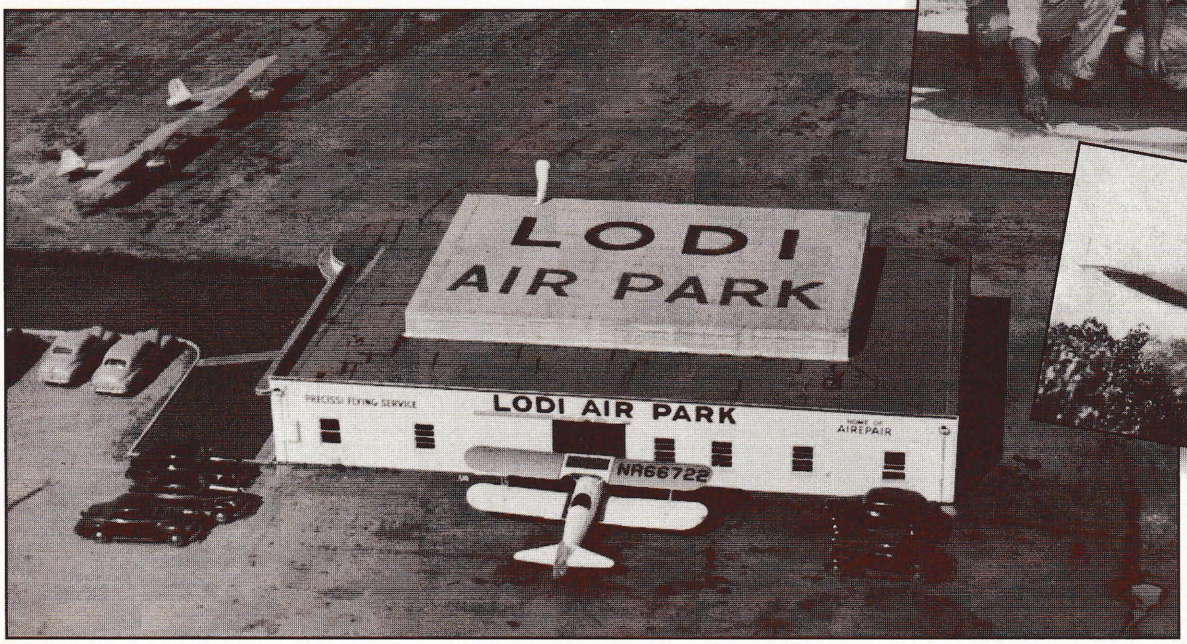
Kingdon Airpark's runway, once crucial to military pilots practicing tricky landings, became an attractive draw for drag racers in the years following the war. It was known as Kingdon Dragstrip when a Stockton police officer purchased the area and converted it to help minimize illegal street racing.

In the mid 1970's it was again converted ... this time back to an airport. David Arnaiz and his partner Rick Grewal now offer hangar rentals and tie down spaces for pilots on this public use airfield. Arnaiz and Grewal plan to hold events such as "Wings and Wheels," a fly-in and car exhibition event, in June 2012.

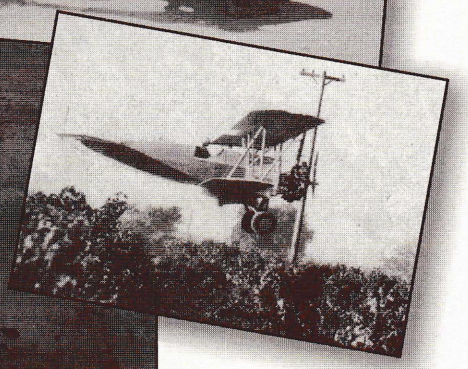
Precissi ... Lodi Airpark

A third airstrip in the Lodi area joined Lind's Airport and Kingdon Airpark after World War II when the Precissi brothers, Joe, Louie, Augie, and Frank, started a crop dusting business called Precissi Flying Service. They bought a biplane and 50 acres for an airfield on Lower Sacramento Road near Armstrong Road. The building foundation was poured on the airfield in December 1945.

Precissi became a crop dusting dynasty. In 1975, the original crew retired and passed the business on to a new generation. Each of the brothers had one son, and the four cousins then operated Precissi. Today, Peter Precissi is President and his cousin Don is Vice President of Precissi Flying Service. Their cousin John went on to a teaching career in the Linden School District, and cousin Joey is in agriculture, farming cherries. Precissi Flying Service now contracts for agriculture and mosquito abatement.



▲ *Precissi Air Park picture taken from the air (1940's). Airepair sign on building.*
Courtesy San Joaquin County Historical Society, Lodi, California.

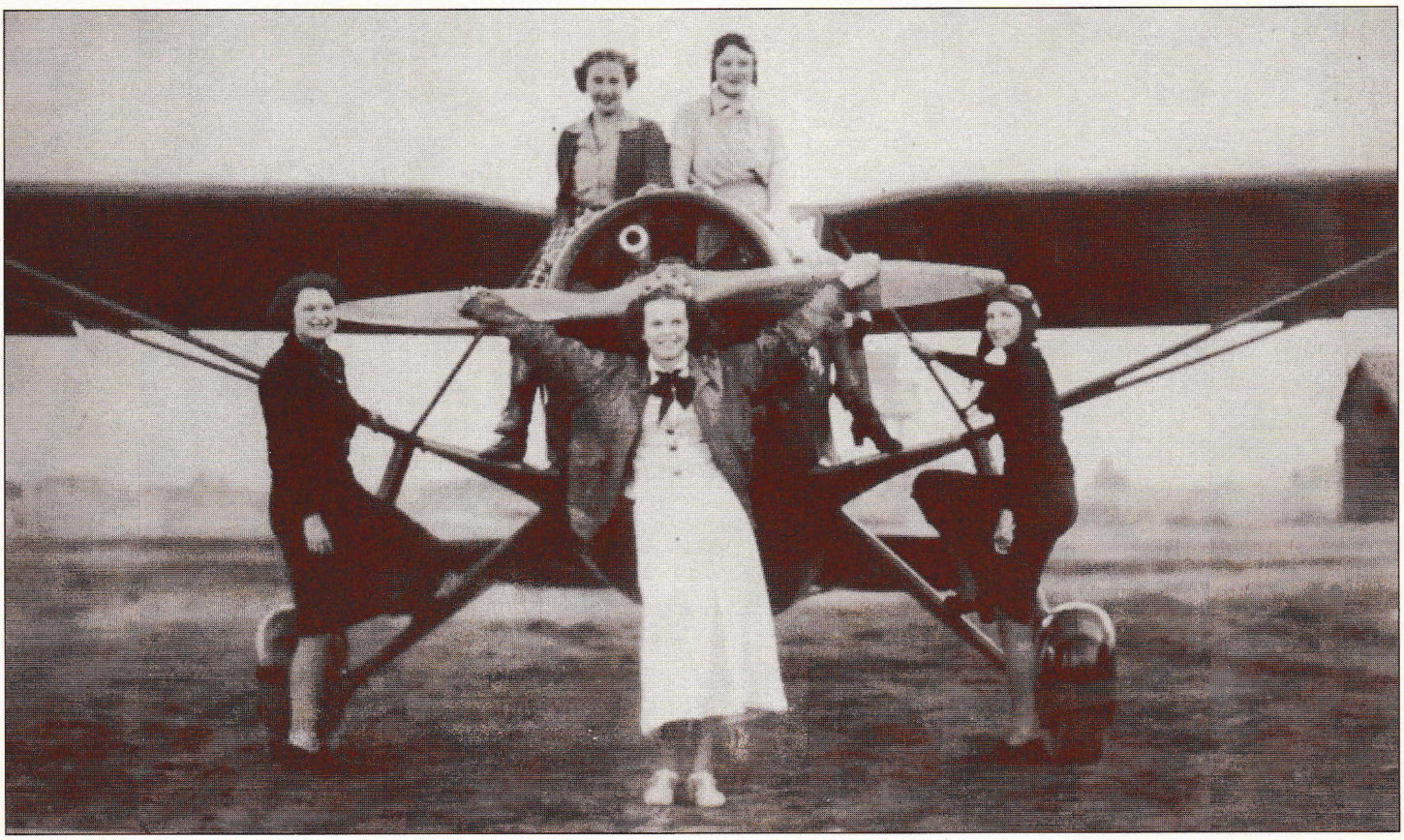


▲ *Above: Lou, Augie, Joe and Frank Precissi, circa 1953.*
Below: A Precissi crop duster.

Celia May Crocker

Celia May Crocker (later Mrs. Wilson Henry Thompson) was not an aviatrix, but she was an active amateur photographer in San Joaquin County from 1903-1957. Celia was born in 1874 and her father, Henry R. Crocker, founded Crocker's Sierra Resort in 1880. Perhaps the picture of Celia on skis was taken at the resort. When Celia was fifteen years of age, she began photography using a camera given to her by a Miss Prindle. Celia was very active with her camera, and many of her photographs were of local scenes including this picture of the Goodyear dirigible landing at Oranges Field on May 12, 1931. Oranges Field was located north of Stockton and later developed for housing. The Lodi Public Library has a major collection of Celia's photography and personal records.

Courtesy Lodi Public Library.



▲ *Publicity photo taken at the Stockton Municipal Airport for the 1936 air show at Modesto Municipal Airport.*

Courtesy The Bank of Stockton Historical Photograph Collection.

Labels for local packing boxes advertised nonstop flying of products from San Francisco to New York. ▶

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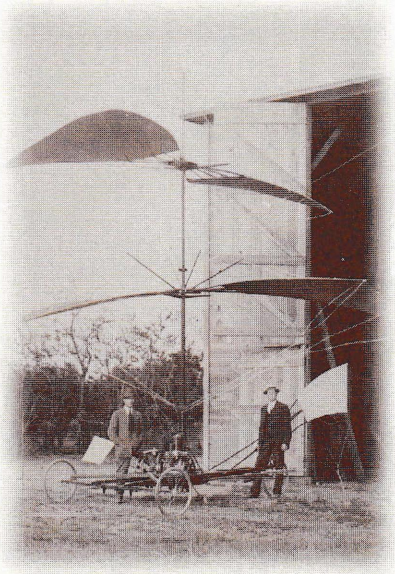

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